

Introduction to Cultural Studies

Lecture 8: The Body – Time – Space

1) The Body: Resistance to Representation?

2) Time: Lifetime, Clock-time, History

3) The Spatial Turn

1) The Body: Resistance to Representation?

Before/beyond representation vs. cultural construction:

- the body (Greek: soma) as the opposite of the sign (Greek: sema)
- feelings (pleasure and pain), states (illness, old age), the limitation of the human life-span (death) and the concrete positioning in space, time, family, culture (i.e., all in all, 'experientiality') resist representation.
- while the biological sex of a human being is a given, it is assimilated into the sphere of culture in terms of gender, resulting in a gendered body constructed by language and performativity (Assmann 2012, 86: "the result is a paradox: the body, which traditionally has been defined as that which cannot be grasped by signs, appears to be a pure product of those signs – simply an effect produced by discourse")
- can the body serve as a repository for agency (i.e. the ability to act) in resistance to its cultural and political subjection?

The body as the basis of knowledge: sense perception

- historical hierarchies of the five senses

Middle Ages (c. 500 to 1500): the age of the ear
Modern Age (after 1500): the age of the eye

- orality > writing > print > visual media
 - surface vs. depth
 - perception + reason/imagination
 - body vs. soul > body vs. mind
- the devaluation, domestication and regulation of the body
 - the revaluation of the body from the 1980s onwards
 - 'having a body' <> 'being a body'

Gender (cf. Jehlen 1995, Kilian 2012):

- the soul / the rational mind / the super-ego as networks of cultural norms and social constraints which control the body and its sexuality > the discursive construction of sex (cf. Foucault 1976-84)
- gender studies analyse the cultural programming which establishes historically variable norms for the sexes which lay down the ground rules for the formation of self-images, identities and attitudes towards life (cf. Butler 1990, 1993)
- taking over from feminism, the core issue is man's patriarchal power over the female body as implemented through institutions (family, school etc.) as well as discourses (politics, art, literature etc., for the latter cf. Schabert 1997 and 2006)
- inquiries into the situation of women (Women's Studies) have been complemented with Men's Studies ('masculinities', cf. Connell 1995, Horlacher 2010) and Queer Studies (cf. Hall 2003, Degele 2008).

Other key terms concerning the cultural conditioning of the body:

- 'body techniques' (Marcel Mauss)
- 'body consciousness' (*cura sui*, 'self-healing', Michel Foucault)
- 'civilisation process' (Norbert Elias)
- 'habitus' (Pierre Bourdieu)

- the 'readability' of the body (physiognomics, phrenology)
- the 'writeability' of the body (tattooing, self-fashioning)

[Cf. Johann Caspar Lavater (1741-1801): physiognomics]

[Cf. Franz Josef Gall (1758- 1828): phrenology]

2) Time: Lifetime, Clock-time, History

Even for those who try to be methodologically alert, it still may come as a sort of epistemic shock to realize how recent is the broad common assumption of historical time as a 'natural' condition – a common medium stretching to infinity 'in' which individuals exist and events take place. It is an epistemic shock to realize that this historical convention is not only completely absent in ancient Greece or medieval Europe, it is by no means commonly held even in 1800.

The construction of historical time in nineteenth-century realist narrative corresponds precisely to that construction of space in realist painting achieved several centuries earlier. In both cases, the apparent focus on realist objects and Subjects has distracted attention from the fact that what such art represents are the media of modernity, neutral time and neutral space.

(Ermarth 1997, 70)

Lifetime:

- the life-span of human beings marks the outer limits of narrativity in terms of experientiality: birth / life / death
> beginning / middle / end (cf. Ricoeur 1990)
- intensity of experience vs. the benefit of hindsight
> experiencing I vs. narrating I
- > diary vs. autobiography
- relations between generations: tradition vs. revolt, orality vs. writing vs. print
- acceleration > alienation & fragmentation compensated by narrativity and / or the emphatic validation of the moment (imagism, epiphanies, stream of consciousness, immersion; cf. Kern 2003, Schleifer 2009)

Clock-time:

- the modern standardization of time (calendars, time-zones) results in homogenous time that relies on the principles of chronological and continuous linearity, irreversibility, and the commensurability of all points in time (cf. Ermarth's 'neutral time' as a 'medium of modernity')
- homogeneous empty time ('clock-time' is the prerequisite of progressivism and historicism (cf. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" 1940)
- "clock-time, though historically clearly the product of Western culture, has become global time as the outcome of a long history of European expansion, conquest and colonialism" (Wiemann 2008, 55)

History:

- progressivism transforms eschatology into teleology (Christianity into philosophy of history)
- all cyclical or static timeframes are superseded by linear chronology heading towards the future (Claude Levi-Strauss: 'cold cultures' > 'hot cultures')
- innovation (originality), progress and growth become the orders of the day

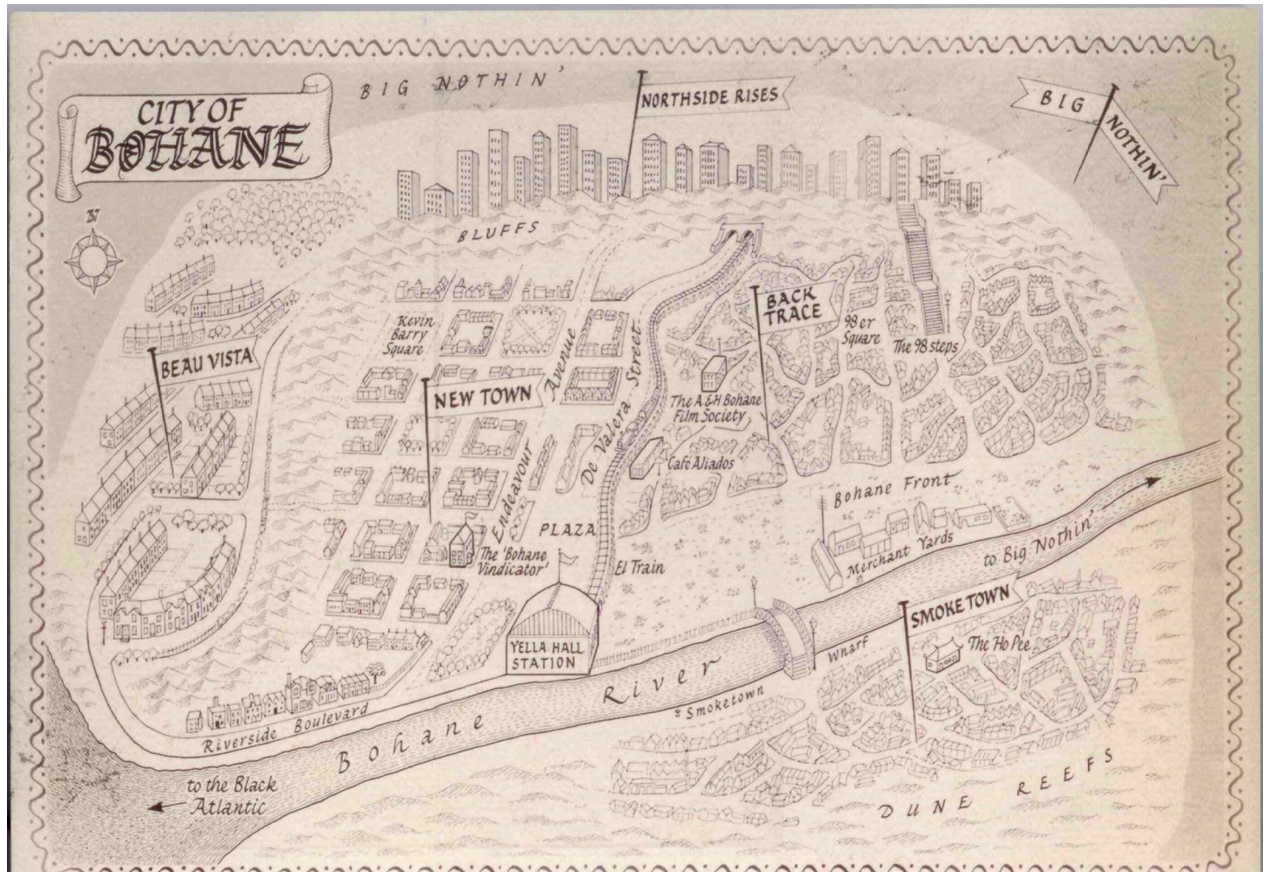
3) The Spatial Turn

- 'time' as the key category in descriptions of modern age has been complemented (superseded?) by 'space' as a key category under 'postmodern' conditions
- the key co-ordinates of spatial perception are rooted in the human body: above, below, front, behind, right, left provide spatial metaphors that structure our way of thinking, e.g. centre vs. margin, surface vs. depth, higher vs. lower value etc. (hearts of darkness, edges of whiteness...)
- 'space': 'the subject of conquest, planning, colonization'
'place': 'crystallization of history and memory'
'land': 'mystic foundation of life' (Assmann 2012, 164)
- modern 'non-places' (airports, car parks etc, cf. Augé 1995)
- globalisation <> glocalisation

The Social Production of Space (cf. Lefebvre 1991):

- space is the product of social construction processes which attach meaning and values to 'natural' or 'absolute space'
- space in this sense derives from practices, perceptions, representations / theories, and the spatial imaginary of a time
- 'lived space', 'perceived space', 'conceived space'

[Map from Kevin Barry, *City of Bohane* (2011) >]



Mark Strand, "Keeping Things Whole" (1964)

In a field
I am the absence
of field.
This is
always the case.
Wherever I am
I am what is missing.

When I walk
I part the air
and always
the air moves in
to fill the spaces
where my body's been.

We all have reasons
for moving.
I move
to keep things whole.

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